

CHALLENGES, CHARACTER, AND CORE VALUES

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

APRIL 26, 2003

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- Thank you for that kind introduction. I would like to thank you, Dean Ban; Andy Blair, the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs; the faculty; and the graduate students for inviting me to give today's commencement address.
- I enjoy giving commencement addresses and appreciate the opportunity to share this very special day with you, the GSPIA graduates, along with your families and friends.
- I wish to congratulate all of you on this significant accomplishment that, I hope, will be one of many important milestones during your careers. Thanks goes to your families whose financial and moral support probably went a long way in helping you achieve your goals.
- As only the second person in my family to graduate from college and as a parent of two college graduates, I know from first-hand experience that family support is both important and, by the way parents, never-ending. None of us should ever underestimate the importance of family.
- This occasion is also noteworthy because GAO, the agency that I head, is no stranger to the University of Pittsburgh. In fact, I understand that GAO has been the single biggest employer of GSPIA grads in the past! A win-win for everyone involved, I might add.

- As many of you know, GAO is in the performance and accountability business, and the scope of our mission covers every area the federal government is involved in, or is thinking about getting involved in, anywhere in the world. Simply put, we try to help the federal government work better for the benefit of all our citizens.
- At GAO, we speak truth to power. Sometimes those in power don't want to hear the truth, but it is important for our country and for our citizens, especially your generation, that the truth not only be heard, but also heeded. Fortunately, those in power normally listen to what GAO has to say and usually act on our recommendations. In addition, most of our reports are published and available on our website (www.gao.gov). This keeps us accountable to our clients, the American people, and the world at large.
- Today, one of GAO's key missions is to use foresight as a means to alert policymakers to long-term challenges facing our nation and its place in the world.
- Most countries, including the United States, are confronted by a range of trends and challenges that have no boundaries. These include challenges such as changing security threats, demographic trends, rapidly evolving science and technology, economic transitions, government transformations, and for the United States and many other industrialized nations projected long-range budget deficits.
- These trends represent shared challenges for many countries, and we should work together to address them as appropriate. We at GAO and you as individuals should also consider them in order to put important issues of the day in a broader context.
- In this regard, it's clear that the world is getting smaller, and borders are becoming less significant. There is an increasing interdependence of enterprises, economies, and national governments. This presents us with many opportunities as well as risks.

- For better or for worse, the economic fortunes of once distant nations are now linked. In addition, the worldwide spread of diseases like AIDS and SARS, our planet's environmental problems, and the current global fight against terrorism now demand international responses to what were once seen as only national concerns.
- As a result, no nation, not even the United States – which is currently considered the world's only current superpower – should go it alone. We have to lean on each other and learn from one another. Let's face it. No one has a claim to planet Earth. It belongs to a higher power than ourselves.
- In order to address today's many borderless challenges, we're partnering more with our fellow performance and accountability professionals, both nationally and internationally.
- For example, I and my counterparts around the world, encompassing more than 180 countries, are working together to promote improved transparency and enhanced accountability in governments around the globe. We're also sharing best practices and lessons learned in a range of areas.
- I would be remiss if I didn't spend a few moments on one challenge that is personally close to America's heart...one that has appeared in the headlines of most major newspapers during the past several weeks. You all know what I'm talking about; it's the war in Iraq.
- War is terrible under any circumstance, and it should be a last resort.
- Men and women, many younger than yourselves, fight for their country and its ideals. Some of you may have friends or family members engaged in battle. I do. Our son, Andy, is a Marine Corps officer in Iraq, and he is doing what he was trained to do, albeit far from home and in harm's way. Not a day goes by that my wife, Mary, and I don't pray for his safe return.

- Our views are like other parents whose sons or daughters are in harm's way, regardless of who they are, where they are, and which country they represent. Ironically, less than a handful of Senators, Members of the House, and high-ranking government officials have a family member in Iraq, and yet, it is these same individuals who may commit others to battle.
- The effects of war are far reaching, and it touches all of us in some way, regardless of our nationality. The negative aspects are obvious, such as the loss of both combatants and innocent civilians. But there can be positive aspects as well, including bringing freedom to a long oppressed people.
- As the hero of the Battle of Gettysburg, Colonel Joshua Chamberlain of Maine once said, "War is for the participants a test of character. More on the subject of character a little later."
- The Iraq war, recent terrorist events, and the current SARS challenge have served to fuel a worldwide heightened sense of vulnerability, prompting many to take stock of their lives and reassess their values and priorities. Ironically, this sense of vulnerability can help bring us together as a nation, as a people, and as a world.
- These events can help all of us to focus more on the word "we" rather than "me." They can also help us to understand how fragile life can be and how we should make the most of it while, hopefully, always being prepared to meet our maker.
- As someone once said, the things that matter most in this world cannot be held in the palm of your hand...love, happiness, justice, freedom, peace...the list goes on and on.
- In the final analysis, irrespective of the challenges that governments may face, there's one thing no one can dispute: An effective government demands a quality workforce...this is true for any government, whether it be the United States or the 16 countries represented by today's graduates. In the final analysis, in today's knowledge-based economy, people represent the most valuable asset of any nation or organization.

- In this regard, I must confess how impressed I am with the diversity of this graduate class. I wish you could see the view from where I'm standing. You're a microcosm of the many faces in today's world, and together, you are a reminder of the peaceful co-existence we all strive to achieve.
- As human beings, we all have much more in common than separates us. We must build on what we have in common and capitalize on the strengths that diversity can bring, especially in the United States, which, in many ways, is a microcosm of the world.
- I understand that many of you will return to your countries after this week's events, anxious to put your newly acquired education to work in your own communities. Your parents and loved ones have sacrificed to send you to the University of Pittsburgh for one reason: for you to get a good education...one that will serve you anywhere in the world.
- As you enter into the next phase of your life, please remember that character counts.
- The word, "character," brings to my mind the words of Dr. Martin Luther King: "I have a dream that my ...children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."
- It is character that defines the type of graduates we must hire in the future. It is character that defines today's public servants around the world. And it is character that will largely define each of you, no matter what you decide to do in life.
- As many recent character failures in the public, private and non-profit sectors have demonstrated, it takes years to build a solid reputation, but it can be lost very quickly due to a real or perceived breach of trust.
- Don't forget. The law sets the minimum standard of acceptable behavior, not the desired state. Always do your best, and always try to do what is right.

- In order to help you find your way I life, please consider adopting a set of core values...or whatever you may choose to call them. They are positive beliefs and personal boundaries that can serve as a foundation for how you will live your lives and make decisions everyday.
- These values can help you stay a true course and avoid the many challenges that will confront you in life. They can also help you make decisions on complex and controversial issues much faster in today's faced-paced and ever-changing world.
- Most world-class organizations have their own set of core values. The Marine Corps' are honor, courage, and commitment; the FBI's, fidelity, bravery, and integrity; and GAO's are accountability, integrity, and reliability.
- We use GAO's core values to guide decision-making both externally in connection with providing services to our client, the U.S. Congress, and internally in our efforts to be a model employer and world-class professional services organization.
- When you come to Washington, I invite you to visit GAO. You'll see our core values over the entrance of our building. They're also on our letterhead, business cards, and on our famous "blue-cover" reports. More importantly, they are in our heads and in our hearts.
- These core values represent our institutional beliefs and boundaries. They describe the nature of our work and, most importantly, the character of our people.
- Having a set of core values can make a difference in many dimensions of your life. They can also help to define and develop your own character. My own personal core values – leadership, integrity, and innovation – have made a difference in my life. I must admit, I've never publicly revealed them before. I didn't have to. Remember, they are here [**head**] and here [**heart**].

- As graduates of a reputable public and international affairs graduate school, you have knowledge and skills that will be in demand, both domestically and internationally, and especially in public service. I understand that many of you may still be undecided on a career choice or you're waiting for that once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.
- As someone who has worked in both the private and public sectors, I can attest that a career in public service is an honorable choice. It offers an opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those you know as well as those who you'll never meet. It's a calling where both individuals and groups are capable of making history and changing the future.
- Ultimately, the choice of public service is grounded in personal values, rather than market values. It attracts people who want to "make a difference" for others; who seek to maximize their self worth rather than their net worth. Individuals who identify more with the word "we" than the word "me." I chose to return to public service for these very reasons, and I plan to serve out my entire 15-year tenure as Comptroller General of the United States.
- In closing, my personal staff will confirm that I can't complete a commencement speech without mentioning one of my personal heroes - President Theodore Roosevelt. Today's commencement speech is no exception.
- Theodore Roosevelt, fondly known as TR, was our youngest president and a man of character, conscience, and conviction. He was a true leader and a real Renaissance man who served as President of the United States in the early years of the last century.
- He is the only person to win both the Nobel Peace Prize and the Congressional Medal of Honor for valor in combat. He was an optimist who firmly believed in the potential of both government and public servants to improve the lives of all its citizens.

- As a trustbuster, TR took on some of the nation's most powerful and ethically challenged corporate interests. And he won. As an environmentalist, he left us a legacy of great national parks with names like Yosemite and the Grand Canyon. As an internationalist, he promoted the building of the Panama Canal and personally led negotiations to secure peace in some of the most troubled parts of the world.
- Clearly, TR was a man of character, and he made a difference in many ways. Each of you can too.
- Remember, in today's world, individuals with a good education, solid character, a strong work ethic, and a positive attitude have virtually unlimited potential.
- Your degree from the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs is evidence of a good education. You have earned it. It's up to you to put it to good use and to deliver on the other key elements of success.
- And don't forget that it's people who try their best to make a difference that really count, even if at first they don't succeed. As TR said: "The credit goes to the person who is in the arena; and aggressive fighting for the right [cause] is the noblest sport the world affords."
- I'm confident that each of you will do your best to make a difference in today's world, no matter what your personal career or cause may be.
- I wish each of you the very best in your chosen careers. May God bless you and your families.

